



DEAR SIR



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BEING A BETWEEN-THE-LINES-BOOK<sup>45</sup>  
ON BUSINESS LETTER WRITING<sup>64</sup>

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TO  
MY MOTHER

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# CHAPTER I

## BUSINESS STATIONERY

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**L**ETTER writing is not merely a matter of composition. Besides composition, the size, shape and colour of paper, the letterhead, and other details which combine to make a good letter, need attention. There is a tendency on the part of many business people, when they think of a letterhead, to scrawl their name and address on a sheet of paper and let the printer's devil do the rest.

**Size**—The size of 10" x 8" is more or less standardized. If your paper is an outsize, you will encounter difficulty in making it fit your typewriter, your files, your duplicating machine. But within the limits of ten inches by eight it is permissible to make variations. Make experiments with folding to determine the size of your envelopes, the letter should be capable of being inserted with ease in the envelope and should not fit too tightly nor too loosely.

**Thickness**—One sheet of paper and one envelope should not weigh more than one tola and there should be a sufficient margin of weight to take a



continuation sheet or one or two enclosures. If this point is overlooked, it will mean an unwholesome addition to your postage bill.

Another consideration is erasability. The paper should not be so thin that with every erasure holes appear in it.

A third consideration is the number of carbon copies usually taken. Obviously, where the work demands that more than one carbon copy is to be taken, the paper of the letter and the copies should be sufficiently thin (or thick) so as to be inserted in the typewriter with ease.

**Colour**—Most letter papers are white, but there is no objection to coloured paper provided the colour is not too deep. Imagine a letter typed in blue on dark blue paper and the strain it means to the eyes, more so when the ribbon of the typewriter is old and faded. The typing of such a letter is a strain to the typist—it must not be forgotten that typists have often to work from seven to eight hours—which is bound to result in mistakes and slowing up of work. The reading of it does nothing but annoy—and it will never do to annoy the recipient. The psychological effect must not be lost sight of.

If you intend to use a half-tone illustration on your letter paper, on no account make the mistake of printing it on a coloured paper. I have come across illustrations printed in brown on a green or

blue background, or something equally nightmarish the effect every time was simply ghastly.

The colour of the paper should be quiet, restful and pleasing. Tinted paper is charming when the selection is well made.

**Quality**—The paper trade manufactures a special kind of paper called bank paper for letters. This is excellent for ordinary purposes. It can take printing in black and all line work, if a coloured letterhead is used. It would, however, be fatal to print on it half-tone illustrations of a fine screen because the result can never be effective, and will be more often than not a blotch.

Art paper is the best for illustrations in black and other colours but, besides being costly, it is heavy and, if written on in ink, the ink has a tendency to spread. I have never seen a business letter typed or written on art paper but there are some papers with coated surfaces which are good for printing as well as writing.

**Surface**—It goes without saying that the surface must be smooth. In offices where much of the correspondence is done by hand, the question of surface is all important. If paper is selected merely for its appearance, one will find it most annoying if the nib scratches the surface or the ink spreads. Besides, metal type, whether of the printer or of the typist, produces different effects when it comes in contact

with different surfaces. As we should strive for the cumulative effect our letter produces, this point is not so unimportant as it sounds. Whether the type face should appear thin or heavy on the paper needs also to be determined

**The Letterhead** — The letterhead needs to be planned with thought and care, all the more so by the small firm or trader. The small businessman cannot afford to spend money on advertising and his correspondence is the only link between him and his clients. Therefore, his letters (not to forget his envelopes) should not have a slipshod appearance but should be neat, striking and effective. It is a pity that many small houses, perhaps through a mistaken notion of economy, fail to take advantage of the valuable (free) publicity space then note papers and envelopes provide

The components of a letterhead are chiefly, (1) the firm's name, (2) the business description, (3) the postal address, (4) the telephone number and telegraphic address (in order of importance), (5) a list of special lines, with or without illustrations, to serve as an advertisement, (6) the device or monogram of the firm—all united to form a pleasing and effective whole. Sometimes such details as names of railway stations, reference numbers and special directions are also added

The designing of a letterhead is a specialist's work and should not be lightly undertaken by the inexpe-

rienced, nor should it be left to the printer under the mistaken belief that he will "see it through". It is always advisable to entrust this work to a good advertising agency, commercial artist or press—people who have the training and experience to group masses of type into pleasing shapes. Do not be scared or discouraged by the initial cost: work of quality has of course to be well paid. Remember you will be sending out letters by hundreds, perhaps thousands, every year, and the first costs of the specialist's fees, block-making charges, good printing and so on, when spread over, are not difficult to bear. It is much better to pay these costs than let your firm be represented by poorly designed and poorly printed note paper.

There can be no two opinions as to the effectiveness of colour in a letterhead. Avoid the so-called "modernistic" style practised by inexperienced exponents where squares, circles, pyramids and what not are thrown together in variegated colours. Such a style is more suited to a cinema poster than to a letter.

Where colour is used, care should be taken that it is pleasingly massed. In a letterhead composed of black and red, the red should be used sparingly. For instance, the trade description line may be picked out in italics in red and somewhat heavier type-face used to restore the lost weight of the red against the black.

Three years ago the *Indian Print and Paper* conducted a competition for letterheads. The judge's comments on the prize-winning entries are here reproduced.

"I was intrigued by the pearls and roses block used by No. 5, no doubt this block has been worked on quite a number of jewellers, but for printers—'roses, roses all the way'—No. I am afraid it won't do. One competitor used what I have a personal detestation for in print—that is a brace. There is of course a real need for braces particularly in statement work but I detest the finicky little two-line brace used in No. 7 and others.

"All except one of the competitors took advantage of the colour rule, some with very satisfactory results but in some instances, it was evidently a source of embarrassment rather than a help.

"Nos. 12 and 14 vied with each other in claims for neatness the former, however, is just too weak. It always has to be remembered that the finished job is not the letterhead alone but the letterhead and the typewritten letter below with somebody's (usually) scrawly, disgraceful signature at the bottom.

"A cardinal error in all printing is the unnecessary use of very small type. It is printed because it is hoped it will be read. Any Coelney looking at No. 14 would surely reply 'What a hope! He's down

amongst the diamonds, pearls and minikins and there we must leave him.'

"No 1 ran up against a difficulty in his design, he didn't know what to do with the descriptive bit of the 'copy' and so he hung it up on a peg, or that is what it looks like to me, but I like his addition, the IPP in echelon formation cutting a red circle, his letterhead is nice and bold, it would take a very horrible signature to get the better of it. I also like his limitation in the selection of types. He refrained from entering into the contest as to who is the most important—the proprietors or the editor—he considered that they were no more important than the building in which the journal is housed so he put them all in the same type and quite right too. But why, why did he put that bit of descriptive matter up in the corner in quarter circular form? Didn't he realise he was wasting a valuable four ems of letter writing space and pushing the heading too low down the paper? The offending wording might have been better spaced above the name line and to the same width, top ranging with the top of the I in the monogram

"No 6's attempt is quite good (except for the brace) but the typist when in merry mood might be tempted to type in the date below the address or above the editor—in other words the arrangement is too 'gappy'

"We get a couple of stars and a half diamond with No. 7 (in addition to another wretched brace). I like

the stars but not the half diamond leading us all off-what? Neither the proprietors nor the editors have been happily attired. A question was raised the other day in British House of Commons as to the Japanese shirts with yards-long tails, well No. 7 has fitted out the proprietors and the editor in similar fitments or mis-fitments "

It will thus be apparent that the devising of your letterhead is not a question to be left to any printer. When even good printers are subject to criticism, it is good policy to consult none but the best. Do not rue the cost for it will repay itself. This point can never be too strongly emphasised.

**The Appearance of the Letter** — The appearance of a letter is as important as its contents. A shabbily typed letter will detract from its value. Most of us were taught at school that in writing the address, the second line must begin a little away from the first, the third a little away from the second, and so on, and that the first line of a paragraph must begin away from the margin. We were also told that there should be a comma after every line in the address and the last line must take a full stop.

The block system of paragraphing and open punctuation, as in the accompanying example, do away with the old methods. What is more, they give a neat and trim appearance to the letter. Besides, a part of the typists' time which would otherwise be

# Pestonjee P. Pocha & Sons

*Seed Merchants*

ESTABLISHED 1884

POSTAL ADDRESS  
8, NAPIER ROAD,

Ref. Genl/ABC

POONA July 12 19

U R Handsome, Esq.  
Elite Street  
Lahore

Dear Sir

As one of the principal means of transacting business, letter writing deserves intelligent thought. The transcriber's part is important in making the letter attractive and clear to the reader.

This letter is an illustration of the proper typewritten arrangement of letters written by Pestonjee P. Pocha & Sons. Notice the position and open punctuation of the reference number, date, address, and closing. Observe the convenient block style of paragraphing. Certain of our offices and departments may find it necessary to add a subject heading, a file number and other data.

A high quality of typing and an attractive arrangement of the letter add to the first impression made on the reader. Correct punctuation and spelling aid in making the thought of the letter clear. And attention to all these details is essential if the letter is to do its most effective work.

Yours faithfully



spent in adjusting the spacing so that in each successive line the address was a bit farther away from the preceding, and in typing commas and stops would be saved. The sum total of such a saving in an office where there are many typists and many letters to be written can well be imagined. And time, as everybody knows, means everything.

## CHAPTER II

# THE LETTER—ITS COMPONENTS

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**The Date**—Forms of putting the date vary in offices. The logical order is day, month and year, but in many offices the practice is to put the date after the month. Whichever method is followed, it is not necessary to add *rd* or *th*, one should not hesitate to write 23 May, for instance. One should not also feel agitated over writing or typing a numeral in place of the name of the month. Though some people insist upon the month being written in full, abbreviations are permitted.

Speaking about abbreviations, if the typist is in the habit of using “Jany” for January or “Novr.” for November, it is clear he needs to be corrected. For his guidance, the correct abbreviations are given below —

Jan	Apr	July	Oct
Feb	May	Aug	Nov
Mar.	June	Sept	Dec

**The Address**—In offices where letters after signing go to a despatcher, it is necessary that the address of the person or firm written to must be typed in full. This practice may be relaxed where the names

and addresses are familiar to the clerk. It would be advisable for the firm to provide the clerk with an address book to note the addresses of regular clients. In such instances, it would be well to confine the address in the letter to two or three lines, as addresses which run into four or five lines look ugly and tend to be top-heavy.

Where the envelope for the letter is prepared by the same person, it would be absurd to show the address in full in the letter and the typist would be well advised not to carry the address beyond three lines.

The title "Messrs" is a source of puzzle to many people. Here is a safe rule. "Messrs" may be omitted in names of corporations or impersonal names, e.g., Tata Sons, Ltd. It is used in addressing a business firm, e.g., Messrs J. E. Bania & Co. "Messrs" is the abbreviation of the French word Messieurs, meaning gentlemen, and it is incorrect to use it when the name of the firm addressed consists of a single name like Jaffer Jussuff.

In the case of large institutions like insurance companies and banks, letters will generally be addressed to the manager or secretary or any other designation according to circumstances. Sometimes the letterhead of a business firm will contain an injunction as to the official to be addressed, and this should be followed.

Mr Mrs. Dr., etc must be written or typed with a full point, but not Mre, Mlle.

**The Salutation**—Every schoolboy is supposed to know the correct forms of salutation, yet one does come across instances of wrong salutations. There are people who will write "Sir" while addressing a business firm "Sir" may be used when writing to a superior, it is very formal when a businessman or an official is to be addressed, and it is wrong to use it in place of "Dear Sir" Incidentally, American firms commonly use the form "Gentlemen" when writing to another firm and I prefer this salutation to "Dear Sirs" on the ground that when in company one calls those present "Gentlemen" and not 'Dear Sirs' Imagine the chairman of a company meeting referring to the audience as "And now, dear sirs ."

While writing to ladies it would be appropriate to say "Mesdames".

**The Complimentary Close** has various forms. Generally, it should suit the salutation It should also be in keeping with one's relations with the person addressed Guard against the inappropriate ending which may spoil the effect of a business letter or give offence to the recipient If you address a person as "My dear Mr So and So" it would be unwise to remain merely "faithfully" his when "Sincerely yours" would hit the mark and gladden his heart

Sometimes the word very is used in the close, such as, "Very truly" Personally I am against this because this word is far too loosely employed both

in writing and speaking. Besides, I cannot imagine anybody grading his feelings—like eggs. If one is sincere, he is sincere, and there the matter ends. However, if the writer's intention is to flatter or to be obsequious or to pour oil on troubled waters, it is permissible to say "Yours very truly" or "Yours very sincerely".

A rule to remember is that in a complimentary close only the first word should be begun with a capital letter. "Yours Faithfully" is wrong but "Yours faithfully" is correct.

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"Few men—or women—who sign their names to many letters a day sign them legibly. Letterheads and initials give a clue in business correspondence, but often the clue is lacking. What is one to do, for instance, when he receives a plain typewritten letter signed, as near as he can make out, "Fakgyg Hrwqsdf"? If he knows it is from his old friend Fred Johnson, he is all right. If it is from a perfect stranger, he doesn't know whether it is from Franklin D. Roosevelt, ex-Governor Landon or Charlie McCarthy. It may be from none of the three.

"Let any one sign his name any way he wishes to. But there ought to be a law to compel him to print or typewrite it also. And women who sign letters without indicating whether they are "Mrs." or "Miss" should be heavily fined and sometimes imprisoned."

—*New York Times*.

## CHAPTER III

### DANGER AHEAD

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TOO frequently the sensitive reader sees in business letters words and phrases repeated with an annoying tiresomeness—words and phrases that have passed into jargon. The intelligent letter writer will avoid them because he understands that it is not necessary to say “your further favour” or “enclosed please find” to write a good letter.

A firm doing business in several lines uses the following ‘form’ letter when despatching goods. It has all the faults of a bad letter. The example serves to show to what extent jargon is used in business correspondence. Such letters are too common and are as solemnly read as they are written.

**Dear Sirs,**

**With reference to your order/letter No.**

**dated            instant, we have much pleasure in  
enclosing herewith Railway Receipt No.            and  
challan for one 10-lb. tin of            Oil railed to  
                         together with our bill in duplicate, which  
we trust you will arrange to liquidate at an early  
date**

( 53 words. )

*Instant*—This is unnecessary. If you are writing in the same month, it is enough to say "of the 20th". If you are referring to a past or future month, it is better to name the month than to say ult or prox. Mr. A. P. Herbert has an amusing piece on the follies of inst, ult and prox.

"I heard the happy lark exult,  
Too soon, for it was early ult.;  
And now the land with rain is rinsed—  
Ah, mournful is the month of inst.;  
Love, like a lizard in the rocks,  
Is hungry for the suns of prox.

"Boy Cupid with his catapult,  
Could find but sorry sport in ult, -  
But through the woods, with bluebells chintzed,  
My lady comes to me in inst.  
And O may Cupid speed the clocks,  
For she will marry me in prox. ! "

*Enclosing herewith*—If you are enclosing a thing, what is it if it is not herewith? Herewith is redundant

*We have much pleasure*—The letter continues to say "in enclosing". Where does the pleasure lie—in enclosing the railway receipt, etc., or in carrying out the order? Besides, if it gives the firm pleasure in sending the papers, why "much"?

*Trust*—The writer means hope. In this instance "trust" is likely to give offence.

*Arrange to liquidate*—Sheer circumvention – and bad English in the bargain “Arrange to” is senseless and “liquidate” is journalese and abominable. The business letter writer must not be afraid to be direct. ‘Please pay’ is direct, simple and not at all offensive

*At an early date, at the earliest possible moment*—Say “early” and do away with unnecessary words

The same letter can be compressed to two-thirds its length without losing meaning or effect. For instance,

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for your order of the 20th. One 10-lb. tin of Oil has been sent by passenger train. We are enclosing our bill which please pay early.

Encl: R/R

Challan

(34 words)

The following is a letter from a newspaper—

Dear Sirs,

We are in receipt of your letter dated 10th instant and the Cheque No. for Rs. 36/- in full settlement of our bill No. and thank you for the same.

Please find herewith enclosed our official receipt for the same.



In the first place, this letter was not at all necessary. It would have been enough to put the official receipt in an envelope and to send it by book post. By writing this letter the newspaper office wasted time and stationery and an extra half anna to cover the postage.

Besides, there are the usual well-worn phrases which pass muster as Business English.

*We are in receipt of...and thank you for same—* This is a great favourite with many writers. Isn't it simpler and more economical, ye thumpers of typewriter keys, to say "We thank you for your cheque"?

*Same—*When will people learn that same is not a pronoun but an adjective? The use of same or the same as in this instance is incorrect. Use it or they or them wherever applicable

*Enclosed please find—*Say "We are enclosing" (or attaching) or our such and such accompanies this letter.

Here is an extract from a circular issued by a shipping company.

"In this connection we would advise that all children must be in possession of passports, whilst those of 16 years and upwards require special permits; from advices received from London it appears that there may take considerable time to obtain; in some cases it has been reported that schools at home

have opposed the idea of evacuating children. It is essential therefore that those parents who do give us instructions regarding their children should also cable definite advices to the guardian or school concerned to ensure their giving us their earnest co-operation.

*In this connection, in connection with* (sometimes spelt connexion)—This is sheer journalese and is too common. It is vile and therefore to be shunned. "About" meets the situation very well.

Consider the following extract taken from a scientific book—

*"In every lunatic asylum at the present day are to be found epileptics who are subject to similar hallucinations in connection with their fits: vain and good humoured often when they are free from fits, but arrogant, irritable, suspicious and aggressive when they suffer in connection with them."*

Here is another piece—

*"We have a garden in connection with our boarding school".*

It would be better to say "attached to" or simply, "Our boarding school has a garden."

Get rid of this connection mania.

*Advice, advices, advise*—Why should 'Commercial English' have the licence to use advice in the plural? Besides, usually no more is meant than inform, tell, information. Stick to inform

*Cases*—Not to be condemned absolutely, but remember there are other words like instance, event, example which might be more frequently—and often aptly—used.

*Evacuating*—The writer of the letter is not to be blamed. Some Government official started it; the word has been repeated in the world's press and now everybody says evacuation when he means no more than dispersing or scattering. Evacuate means "to make empty".

"You advised me that these were out of stock, but included the cost in the shipment sent to me."

*Shipment* is something sent by ship, but the writer was complaining about a post parcel. Mark advised for informed.

"We should like to point out that the stock size of the paper is  $17\frac{1}{2}'' \times 22\frac{1}{2}''$  and not  $17\frac{1}{2}'' \times 22''$  as originally advised. This was a typographical error which we regret".

*Typographical* means pertaining to printing. Typing is the correct word. "Advised" again!

"Please expedite despatch or retransmit the stamps". The writer meant return.

"A few hints on selections would be appreciated, the soil is mostly black cotton soil, and oblige."

*And oblige* is a hot favourite with many people, and appears as a needless tail-piece. It is formal and meaningless and often, as in this instance, ungrammatical

"Our syrups are of the very best "

I have yet to hear of somewhat best, good best, more best and so on. Doesn't very best sound silly? Then why use it?

"I am pleased to be able to inform you that the seeds I have purchased in the past have given complete satisfaction "

*Pleased*—This is a royal prerogative. In a business letter it sounds out of place and pompous. There is, however, no objection to "I am pleased with your seeds" because it shows the extent of your pleasure.

Why the writer should have been "able" to inform beats me. Did it require an effort? This phrase is on a par with "I have to thank you"—as if compulsion is needed to thank a person! Compare also "*I may say that*", "*In reply we wish to state that*".

Letter from an insurance agent—

"I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of date enclosing an application for a fidelity bond, and a form of agreement for which I thank you.

"I am forwarding these to my head office to do the needful in the matter, and I will advise you on hearing from them."

*Beg to*—In former days the expression was beg leave to. "Beg to" is senseless and servile. Why should anybody beg when he is merely saying he has received a letter? If you say "I thank you for your letter", you economise by three words

*Of date, of even date*—Of today?

*To do the needful*—Another cliché favoured by businessmen. Try to be precise

' Please forward per V. P. P. a copy of your price list for vegetable and flower seeds, also any *propaganda* on mushroom growing, and oblige "

Literature is the correct word, my dear sir. Mark "and oblige "

*Per*—By. Discriminate in the use of per. Use per before Latin nouns only. as, per cent, per annum. Before English words use a. as a rupee a day, ten rupees a pound

"A *reiteration* of the point would be fruitless "

Do you ever say re-repetition. Mr. Writer? No. Then why reiteration? Iteration means repetition; reiteration is stupid.

"The parcel was presented to the *party* who refused to accept it "

Party is a collection of persons, such as a political party, party of students. In a legal suit there may

be more than two persons taking part and we call them parties to the suit. It is wrong to use party in the sense of a person. Use the appropriate word, such as customer, and be done with party.

*"Your favour of even date to hand."*

This is a great favourite with business letter writers. If you do not wish your letter to appear stiff and silly, scrap forms of expression such as this. Why should a letter be a favour and why cannot receive serve better than "to hand" or "at hand"? "Favour", "kind favour", "further favour", "esteemed favour" and so on must never appear in good letters.

*Even date*—Be precise and mention the date of the letter.

*"Please reply by return post"*

*Return post*—Is it *returning* post? If so, what is a *returning* post? It is much better to say promptly, immediately or at once.

*"We thank you for your letter of the , the contents of which have been duly noted"*

The words in italics are redundant. How can you answer a letter unless you have "noted" what it says? And why "duly"?

*"You do not indicate which all varieties you require"*

*Which all, what all*—Babuisms Avoid them like the plague. Compare the very common “you all”

“There was nothing wrong with the goods when despatched from this end.”

*This end*—Here

“We do not wish to displease a customer like your good self” “Your good self will note”, etc.

*Your good self*—What’s wrong with “you”? Is it feared that if a person is not called his good self he will be angry?

“Referring to the above subject .”

*Above*—“Above subject”, “above remarks”, “above quotation”, etc Above is an adverb. How can you use it as an adjective? Why not say “the subject mentioned above”, or “the remarks made above”? If you allow above, how can you take objection to “below quotation” or “therein explanation”?

“Our catalogue is being sent to you *under separate cover*” —Isn’t it simpler to say “separately”? And why not be precise and add “by book post” or “registered parcel post” as the case may be?

### EXERCISE

Convert the following letter into good English.

“Your kind favour of the 10th instant is duly received by this office. I have also received your

## DANGER AHEAD

sample of linked chain. I am enquiring into the matter and I shall let you know in due course of time whether such chains are available out here. I used to supply large quantity of similar chains and having supplied to various friends in different places I am enquiring with the said firms whether anyone of them have got in stock. In any case in due course of time your sample will be duly forwarded to you back.

"Nothing further to add by this opportunity."

( 105 words )

### My version

Thank you for your letter of the 10th and sample of chain. I have sold similar chain to other firms and I think I can sell it to you too. I am making inquiries and hope to write to you shortly. If I do not succeed, your sample will be returned. This is all I can say at the moment.

( 60 words - 51 if the last line is omitted. )

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"Dear Sirs,

We would kindly refer you to our letter of the 12th instant giving you all the particulars with quotations but regret to find that we have not been favoured with your esteemed order nor have we received any advices in this connection.



We presume that the matter is still under consideration, and no doubt we will have the pleasure of hearing from you as soon as you have reached a definite decision.

Yours faithfully,

*Kindly*—My dictionary says kindly is an *adjective* meaning “congenial, kind; benevolent; beneficial” Therefore it is wrong to use kindly in the senso of please “We would kindly refer you” (instead of “Will you please refer to”) is the height of absurdity.

*Esteemcd*—When a firm is in business it gives orders and receives orders, otherwise there would be no sense in its existence The giving and receiving of orders depend upon many things, such as quality of goods, price and so on Phrases like “esteemcd”, “highly valued”, “deeply regarded” . . are not going to influence anybody. They merely sound silly, so why use them?

*Definite decision*—Decision means final judgment. How any decision can be less *un*-definite (not to be confused with *definitive*, final) beats me. Knock off “definite”.

The whole letter is dull and heavy. It has the usual sprinkling of favours, advices and connections. The aim of every letter writer should be to make his letters simple and bright.

Try rewriting this letter as an exercise.

## CHAPTER IV

# JOURNALESE

---

NEWSPAPERS are our daily companions. If we learn news from them, we also learn some bad things—bad words and expressions, for instance. Some of these have crept into ‘Commercial English’ and deserve to be hounded out

*Prepared to*—It is rare to hear anybody saying, “I am willing to do such and such a thing”, or “I am able to do it”. What one hears is “prepared to” year in and year out and almost nothing else. Why, I don’t know. Somebody started it I suppose and everybody else has taken it up

Now, if you say you are prepared to do a thing, it means that you have completed your preparations to do it. If Mr. Churchill says he is prepared to do battle, he means just that. But if a businessman says, “I am prepared to accept your quotation”, he only expresses his *willingness* to pay the price, and no more

Therefore, when there are other good words like *willingness*, *ability* and *readiness*, use them. Deter-

mine now never to say "prepared to" again and you will be surprised to find that you can get along very well without it.

*Issue*—This is a word misused and unnecessarily hard worked. You cannot pick up a newspaper or a magazine without coming across it. It does not mean question or point or fact, yet thousands of people say "issue" when what they mean is point or question or matter.

Here is a combination of "prepared to" and "issue".-

"Mr. Justice Niyogi is prepared to reserve his final opinion on the issues involved in the case until they come up for hearing before a Division Bench of the High Court."—Bombay paper.

Substitute willing for prepared and points for issues (or delete "on the issues involved" altogether) and see the result.

*Ability and Capacity*—A weakness of the journalist is the inability to discriminate between ability and capacity. Capacity implies the power of receiving and containing, which is not the same thing as ability, because ability is skill, power or means.

"Men's *Capacity* to Hold Out 'Taxed to the Utmost'"  
—Headline in a Bombay paper.

"The Indian political leaders have shown their willingness and *capacity* to govern"—Bombay paper.

*In this connection*—Strewn on almost every page of almost every newspaper and journal. We have already discussed this but I cannot resist the temptation of quoting one more example.

"Weighty matters on hand but your action or your decisions in connection therewith are held up"—R. H. Naylor in one of his weekly forecasts.

What's wrong with "on them" instead of "in connection therewith"? Six letters as against twenty-one!

*In a position to*—Vague and woolly way of implying ability or strength.

"Then and then alone will our house be built upon a rock and not upon the sand and be in a position to weather all storms and floods and rains"—Mr S. C. Bose as reported in a Bombay paper

Mr. Bose spoilt a good sentence

In business letter writing if one cannot do a thing (for certain reasons) or is unable to do it, better say so rather than, for instance, "We are not in a position to comply with your request."

*Circles and Quarters*—The journalist has a fondness for these. A columnist once succumbed to the lure of these words three times in two paragraphs

"It is believed in well-informed quarters in London..". "The Judicial Committee, it is strongly

urged here in professional circles ..", "It is urged in responsible Indian circles in London..."

Suppose we said "Diplomatic London ' for "well informed quarters in London", or "by responsible Indians" instead of "responsible Indian circles"! Suppose we said merely politicians for political quarters. businessmen for business circles! We would certainly improve our letters and economise in words.

Journalists are experts at coining words but very often the words they coin are ugly. If they are stumped for a word, they are either too lazy or indifferent to sit down and think. But if they have an excuse in lack of time and the hurry and bustle of daily journalism, the business letter writer has none.

One of the habits of the journalist is to add *-ise* or prefix *-de* or *-dis* to a word and be done with it. Somebody else copies the word and lo, in a short time it becomes current.

"*Enthronization* of the Bishop"—Headline in a Ceylon paper.

"...also it was carried out at the unsuitable moment, for Rumania, when Germany was beginning to *Munichise* South East Europe."—Bombay paper.

"With regard to the Scout movement, it is understood, references were made to the need to *de-officialise* the movement in the provinces" — Bombay paper.

"I saw a most interesting demonstration of the method by which that company carries out the work of *disinsectisation*" - Bombay paper.

Pick up any paper any day and see how the habit has spread.

The war has given us a whole crop of unpleasant new words

Said the Rt. Hon. Clement Attlee on July 7, 1940—  
"There is a phrase used a great deal now, Fifth Column I don't like it. I prefer the old-fashioned word Traitor"

In the same class with fifth column is Quisling which is not pleasant to the ear

"Blitzkrieg" bids fair to get into the English language What's wrong with lightning stroke or attack with its sense of speed and surprise?

*Evacuee* We have seen that to evacuate means to make empty When some people are removed from one place to another it does not mean evacuation. Evacuation is bad enough, but what about evacuee, meaning a person "evacuated"? Also, what about "self-evacuating person" and "re-evacuation"? Don't you feel murderous?

"All the lovely gowns worn by Binnie Barnes in 'Day-Time Wife' are from her personal wardrobe, which was *commandeered* by 20th Century Fox for the film"

The dictionary meaning of commandeer is "to seize for military purposes". Fancy rigging out an army in an actress's clothes!

Two recent words are "trainee" (for pupils) and "bombee" (for person or persons bombed). Is there no stop to this sort of thing?

The late Mr. Chamberlain was in the habit of saying anticipate for expect--and he was not alone. Guard against this habit because anticipate and expect do not mean the same thing.

How many times does one see "contact" used as a verb? Contact is a noun and you cannot use it as a verb. It is utterly wrong to write, "Our Mr. Brown will contact your Mr. Jones." Be careful of "to contact".

Similarly, be careful of "to service". If the advertiser tells you he does *servicing* of radios or cars, he is presenting a mongrel word for your acceptance. Keep "servicing" out of your letter writing.

So far I thought only men and horses and dogs had pedigree. But now I know I am wrong--if I may believe the writers of the following advertisements--

"A Pedigree Butter ... X's Butter is a *thoroughbred* butter in every respect."

"Consult...for any kind of clocks with a pedigree"

"Pedigree Picture. X's have the longest pedigree in every class of amateur camera."

Incidentally, what is an amateur camera? Something akin to an amateur sportsman?

*Casualty* means an accident, resulting in injury or loss of life. It definitely does not mean injured person or death, yet the word is nowadays employed in no other sense but injured person or death.

*Different to*--This is becoming fairly common in journalism as well as in business correspondence. The correct preposition to follow different is "from" not "to".

The indiscretions of the journalist are many. What he writes today might be unthinkingly copied tomorrow. Anybody who wishes to be a good letter writer must for ever guard against the tendency to copy blindly. If he already has copied, it will be a struggle not to lapse into journalistic jargon, but the struggle will be well worth making.



## CHAPTER V

### "I HAVE THE HONOUR . . ."

---

"FOR who *could* escape the creeping stain of those ill-used years during which I was caught in the machine and made to grind out the stuff that masquerades as *English* under the heading 'On His Majesty's Service'. Does His Majesty know what a mis-service that is? Hitherto none of his Ministers has warned him that his loyal and faithful people have, as a body, no voice except this chipped and flattened gramophone record, official English. What a vile dirge it is! How insidious its poison, working on the brains and vitality of the Civil Services who have to turn it on!" — Richard Church in the *Spectator*, 30-8-1940.

Anybody who is serving in a Government office must give up the hope of writing good, plain English, anybody who wishes to write good, plain English must never serve in a Government office. When the cold, bony hand of official jargon descends on you, it chills inspiration, freezes common sense.

When I started work as a junior clerk in a Government office, I was asked to draft a letter to the hono-

of another department I began with ~~Dear~~ "Sir" and put in a lot of stuff that was quite informal. I was told that it was all wrong, that every letter should begin with "Sir" and should tell the other fellow that the writer had "the honour of stating", etc., and should end by informing him that the writer had the honour to remain his "most obedient servant"

I typed that letter and I typed many more, some of which were mere two-line efforts but which, nevertheless, strictly followed the formula.

There is prevalent in Government offices the absurd practice of returning a letter or set of letters for remarks or explanation. If the correspondence happens to be long and protracted, the papers become so tattered in the process of exchange, they become finally fit for the grave-yard! The purpose appears to be to save stationery, but the paper and time the poor quill-driving clerks waste in making copies for their own record are no consideration. Equally wasteful is the practice of sending entire copies of papers. This is supposed to make the point absolutely clear to the other fellow, actually, it saves the clerk the trouble of making a precis

One must not suppose that Government officials lack in courtesy. A correspondence is always "returned with compliments", and if a superior has occasion to 'fire' a junior, he always precedes his remarks with compliments to soften the effect. And

there are some poor fish who, not being sure whether presenting mere compliments to a superior would satisfy him, take the trouble of returning the correspondence "with respects". The day is not far off when it will be returned with "most obedient respects"!

But this is not enough. Every Government official in India is supposed to be kind to another. Nothing is ever asked to be done: it is always kindly done. As in everything else, this sort of thing can be carried too far. A letter I once read consisted of five short sentences each of which began with a "Please". Letters in which a "please" or a "may kindly" are sprinkled here and there, just to show that the writer is a thorough gentleman, are legion. And there is the classic example of the official who wrote to the executive engineer of his district that the east wing of his office "*may kindly be got repaired*". Gosh!

So attached are officers and their clerks to red tape that to depart from the mode established God knows when would be sacrilege to them. It would never do, for instance, to say, "We do not know what you are referring to", but to say, "This office is not aware of..." is considered quite proper and is supposed not to offend the reader. Incidentally, the head of every Government office is reluctant to use the first person singular, and to say "we" meaning the office or department, is taboo. Officials in India are delightfully non-personal and always call themselves "this office".

Equally abhorrent to them is to omit the month or the year from a letter. This is carried to such absurd lengths that this kind of thing is perpetrated almost daily. "Sir, With reference to the correspondence resting with your No. 123 dated 5-9-1937, and in continuation of this office letter No. 456 dated 6-9-1937, I have the honour to inform you that the statement said to have been enclosed with your letter No 789 dated 28-8-1937 has not been received in this office"

If you wish to be a good letter writer, follow neither the system of correspondence nor the peculiar jargon used in Government offices.

Now let us see a few examples.

"Sir,

I have the honour to enclose herewith a receipt No. 1247, dated 25-7-1940, on account of the advertisement charges in                      amounting to Rs. 35 for the year 1940-41.

Kindly acknowledge same and oblige.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,"

Now, anybody will tell you that when you are sending a receipt for money, there is hardly any need for a letter. What you have to do is to put the receipt in an envelope and send it by book post. In this example, the bright lad has repeated the details

of the receipt, wasted time, stationery and postage, and unnecessarily increased his work to the detriment perhaps of important and urgent duties.

The phrases "I have the honour to enclose" and "Your most obedient servant" are sheer bombast. The official language used for such a trivial matter as sending a receipt is ridiculous. Just pin a slip bearing "With the compliments of" (if one is a stickler on courtesy) and the matter is over.

"Kindly acknowledge same and oblige" is carrying things too far. Acknowledgment of a money receipt? There would then be no end to correspondence.

Here is a letter from a postmaster—

"I have the honour to request you please to intimate whether you are in receipt of the value of Model Town Money Order No 1184 D/- 19-9-40 for Rs. 19/2, and if so the date of payment may please be intimated. This may please be treated as very urgent "

Mark "please" and "intimated". Mark also the stupidity in leaving out the most valuable information — the name of the sender. Would the writer have lost face if he had written—

"Money Order No. so and so of... .. for Rs 19/2 from Mr. .... . ....posted at Model Town Post Office; have you received payment? If so, when?"

But why blame a poor postmaster?

"I HAVE THE HONOUR,"

The executive officer of an Indian cantonment wrote thus—

"Dear Sirs,

Reference your No. Gen/ELJ dated 2-2-39

It is pointed out that this office has not received any copies of the                      besides the one supplied at the first instance. Delay in pointing it out is due to an oversight which is regretted. I am unaware of the reasons as to why the supply thereof was not started; but the facts can well be verified from your records. I shall be glad if you will please now commence its supply."

The letter begins with "this office" which suddenly becomes "I". "Supplied at the first instance" does not mean anything to me. Why regret the oversight, Mr Executive Officer, you are making a complaint, who asked for your explanation? "I am unaware of the reasons .", "supply thereof". . I give it up !

Here is a form of receipt of publications—

"Received from the Director of Agriculture, Madras, South India, the undermentioned copies —"

Need we be told that Madras is in South India? Is it red tape or stupidity or both? And why "undermentioned" ?

Here is the political Agent of an Indian state speaking—

"The favour of an acknowledgment is requested."

Tortuous way of saying "Please acknowledge "

The writer who is quoted at the beginning of this chapter once wrote in a file, "This man is a liar." He was right. But his superior officer would not have it and added a minute to the effect that "having regard to the circumstances as evidenced in the correspondence, it would appear that the applicant's statements were not strictly in accordance with those within the cognisance of the Department."

See the verbiage, see the hesitancy to call a spade a spade. Much official language is wrapped up in long-winded chatter because the writers are too afraid to commit themselves to anything.

### Prize Piece

"Separate departments on the same premises are treated as separate premises for this purpose where separate branches of work which are commonly carried on as separate businesses in separate premises are carried on in separate departments in the same premises"—A Ministry of Labour notice.



The purpose of this chapter is to tell the ambitious writer not to be woolly, non-committal and over-cautious. He must learn to be brief, precise and to the point. He must eschew jargon. If he has had the misfortune of working in a Government office, he

must unlearn what he has learnt He must return to plain English and common sense

" You remember Nelson's signal ' England expects that every man will do his duty.' Good ! But suppose that signal had been drafted by one of our fat word-breeders in Whitehall, that signal would have run thus ' England anticipates'—nobody can say expects today—'that with regard to the current emergency, personnel will duly implement their obligations in accordance with the functions allocated to their respective age-groups '

—A. P Herbert



## CHAPTER VI

### THEY WRITE FOR ADS.

---

JOURNALISM is a growing profession in India. More and more papers are coming into existence and are competing in a somewhat limited market. It is true that many of them die after a feeble struggle, but this apparently has no effect on the ardour of many an adventurer in journalism.

Since a newspaper must have advertisements if it has to survive, thousands of letters go out every day from newspaper offices begging for advertisements. Only a few of them are good. the rest, as I can vouch from experience, are bad and by their dull appearance, uninspiring language and errors in grammar frustrate the very purpose for which they are intended.

A common fault with these letters is that they are written from the "we" angle. The writers of these letters take it for granted that the prospective advertiser is terribly interested in the survival of their papers. Very few tell the advertiser just how and why *he* is going to be benefited. In my opinion, the drafting of a letter soliciting advertisements requires as much artistry as the drafting of an advertisement.

It is common knowledge that the advertising manager of any firm or company is a busy man. Every day in his post he receives several letters from newspapers and periodicals. By force of habit his hands are trained to deposit these letters – or at least a large part of them—in the waste-paper basket. He has usually a certain number of papers in mind but there is always a little extra provision in his budget for a little extra advertising. Therefore he is not insensible to a really good claim on that little extra provision when he comes across it.

Being a busy man, he is inclined to be irritable. When he receives a *printed* letter from some paper accompanied by a number of coloured sheets loosely pinned, stuffed in a cheap envelope and sent by book-post, he assumes an expression showing contempt, mutters under his breath and, without even a glance at the papers, consigns them wholesale into the w p. b. To think that there are people so unimaginative and stupid as to expect their prospective clients to wade through a lot of unattractive printed stuff! Sheer waste of labour, stationery and postage!

Some offices send the advertisement manager an indistinct and faded carbon copy of a letter thereby showing that they think so little of him that they do not care to write to him a clean, typewritten letter. Such compliments are usually always passed on to the w p b. Those who send cyclostyled copies—often badly turned out—receive the same fate.

The lack of vision shown by the conductors of newspapers is amazing. They want custom; they mean to hold custom once they get it. Yet they will give no thought to the appearance of their letters and to first impressions. They little realise that for a letter to stand out among many others, to gain attention and ultimately to gain business, thoughtful planning is necessary.

Some among the letters that are read suggest, by their lifeless letterheads, careless selection of type and slipshod appearance that the advertiser is going to get poor attention to his 'copy'. Such letters are merely filed or get a polite refusal.

Some others are marred by faulty grammar and spelling—not likely to inspire confidence in the prospective advertiser. In this book we are more interested in these and I give below a few specimens.

Lahore

Dear Sir,

Under separate cover we are sending you a sample of the P. . . A. . . for your kind consideration, and point out to you, that a wide and extensive advertisement will creat wide market for you.

You must be knowing this simple fact that goods don't sell themselves. Every one has to make his own market in this world. We hope you will use of our paper and probably try to give us some business

Our rates are moderate and reasonable, by changing your old medium and giving business new paper, you will be sufficiently benefitted.

Yours etc.

*Wide and extensive advertisement*—What is that? Does that mean the size of the advertisement?

*Our rates are moderate*—You make this claim but omit to say what they are

*Changing your old medium, etc.*—Why? Trying to run down one's competitors is not good salesmanship. Why not make a different suggestion? And what makes you think we shall be benefitted?

Mark the spelling mistakes and omissions

Allahabad

We have the pleasure in forwarding to you under a separate cover a copy of our journal the D for your perusal, the receipt of which please acknowledge.

We shall be pleased to know if you would like to advertise in the magazine. The journal is now one year's standing and widely circulated in India and Burma.

On hearing from you we shall be pleased to supply the necessary details.

*One year's standing* — Pray sit down, you must be tired.

*Widely circulated, etc.*—Merely your word. Such claims don't hold water. Tell me, what is your circulation, class of readers, and so on. Your journal is in Urdu, a language I can't read. How do you expect me to know what the magazine is about?

*Necessary details*—Why not say now? Why wait? I have no time to write

New Delhi

These papers have gained confidence and patronization from the public in general and Hindus in particular. This is golden Chance for advertisers to book their advertisements in our Daily H——, etc.

*Patronization*—This gets my goat. You mean patronage.

*Chance*—Why the capital letter? And I don't believe you

Besides, dear writer of the letter, did not your teacher instruct you in the use of the definite and indefinite articles?

Bombay

May we suggest to you to give the N—— the privilege of carrying your sales message on a stable basis?

God knows what that means, but I don't like stables anyway. Smelly things. What's wrong with a garage?

The following extracts are from a printed letter. The letter would not have attracted notice but for the name of a great paper it bore

Poona

We have great pleasure to inform you that on the auspicious occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of our INSTITUTION which comes off on \_\_\_\_\_, we have decided to celebrate same on a large scale and take out a special Diamond Jubilee Number of the K\_\_\_\_\_. The Diamond Jubilee number will contain historical review of the progress of India. Taking into account the importance of the Jubilee Number, it is expected that the same will sell very widely. We therefore request you to take advantage of the same.

*Great*—Leave off that. It impresses nobody.

*Institution*—I have scanned your letterhead but find no name of any institution. Do you mean your paper? Then why not say so?

*Take out*—I seem to think it should be bring out.

*Contain historical review*—A historical review?

*Same*—Three times in one letter. Tch! Tch!

And now, I have before me a folder issued by an Ahmedabad publisher about a guide book. On the first page is an illustration (toneless and badly printed and surrounded by a fancy border) beneath which run the words —

"Two hundred words like this will contain,"  
 Babuism run rampant'

Here are a few more howlers from this folder.

"The book will be divided into five sections."

"Sanitoriums", "Dinning car tariffs", "Bung-  
 lows" "Telegram offices", "And other two  
 hundred Photoes", "Compiled by Mr. "

A bad piece of work, Mr. Publisher, and you expect  
 Mr. Advertisement Manager to advertise in your  
 book! Some 'opes!

I am reproducing below the advertisement of a  
 widely advertised antiseptic

### THE SMALLEST CUT MAY PROVE FATAL - SAFEGUARD WITH D\_\_\_\_\_

Take care of cuts and wounds! Sharp things  
 like knives, scissors, tin-openers, can cause poison-  
 ous wounds to you and your children. Bathe cuts  
 and wounds with D\_\_\_\_\_Antiseptic. You can buy  
 D\_\_\_\_\_ everywhere and Doctors and Hospitals use  
 it. Always keep a bottle in your house to safeguard  
 your family - use it for wounds, for gargling, for  
 bathing and personal hygiene. D\_\_\_\_\_ is a powerful  
 antiseptic but it is non-poisonous and will not stain  
 skin and clothing.

The advertisement is accompanied by illustrations  
 showing the uses of the antiseptic: "For gargling",  
 "For grazes", "For the bath", "For personal hy-  
 giene", "For midwifery".

In my humble opinion, the advertisement would read better and gain in white space if curtailed and re-arranged thus —

### THE SMALLEST CUT MAY PROVE FATAL ~ SAFEGUARD WITH D\_\_\_\_\_

Take care of cuts and wounds ! Sharp things like knives, scissors, tin-openers, can cause poisonous wounds. Bathe cuts and wounds with D\_\_\_\_\_ Antiseptic. Always keep a bottle in the house. D\_\_\_\_\_ is a powerful antiseptic but it is non-poisonous and will not stain skin or clothing.

Used by Doctors and Hospitals

You can buy D\_\_\_\_\_ everywhere

There is really no excuse for this irrelevant discussion except to give a hint to the advertisement-letter writer to put his case briefly and pungently.

### Prize Piece

Cawnpore

While distinguishing and recognising your advertisement in lot of papers been under my study and perusal I beg to approach your kind attention to my paper for which I assure you to have good result than those of other paper of same capacity.

The capacity of this paper I beg to announce that it is an organ of "All-India M . Conference" leading to about 4 crores Ansar community, populated in every part of India,



Burma and Ceylon, circulation about 5000 and issues to villages, towns and cities to be passed under sight of Indians of all community more than the same amount, that issues to such small places will not be found on comparison with those of others

Owing above its increment with rapid advance during short period, as it was unknown prior to some years and now become pictorial with so high circulation.

Under these I expect your esteemed trial order to advertise your products and dealings, as our assurance to prove your success to the extensive scale to meet your desire.

Anticipating the pleasure to be able to continue your dealing to the entire satisfaction our prompt and careful attention will not cause you any dis-satisfaction.

An early respond is solicited.

These examples, drawn from many places, will, I think, suffice to demonstrate to the advertisement-letter writer that since his business is to get business, it is worth while doing it properly

## CHAPTER VI

### UNHAPPY ENDINGS

---

HAVING planned and written your letter it would be a tragedy if it ended with some hackneyed phrase. Sometimes even good letters are spoiled by an unhappy ending. People write a closing sentence because they wish to give a flourish to the letter or because a letter that comes abruptly to a close leaves them with a sense of emptiness, or even because they feel that it is *infra dig* to close a letter without some assurance of attention or service.

I believe that a letter must end naturally. There should be no straining after effect. And the letter writer must not fear that if there is no closing sentence he is committing a grave breach of etiquette. Most closing sentences one reads are formal, hackneyed and badly phrased. I give a list below.

“Assuring you of our best attention at all times”

“Awaiting further commands”

“Thanking you in anticipation”

“Thanking you for all your kind favours”

“Trusting this will be satisfactory”

Many of the phrases simply hang in the air, such as, "Thanking you, Yours faithfully". A participial clause should be followed by a noun or pronoun, therefore, if you must say "Thanking you" or "Assuring you, etc", don't let the sentence trail off but let it be followed by something like "We are" or "We remain"

*At all times*— Say always

*Further commands*—Why "commands"?

*In anticipation*—In anticipation of what?

These endings when repeated in every letter become tiresome and meaningless. When you receive an inquiry from a man you may assure him that you will give your careful attention to whatever he says. An assurance given once is enough. When you have established relations with him, why bother the poor man with your assurances in every letter you write! It becomes ridiculous.

The meaningless repetition of such phrases may sometimes land the writer in difficulties. I have known chaps delaying over a reply and then giving me an assurance of "best attention" when it is quite clear that they will do nothing of the kind. I have known some other fellows making mistake after mistake and yet giving assurance of service and attention. Such assurances are sheer nonsense. They invite sarcasm—or violence, or both.

## UNHAPPY ENDING

Some time ago while turning over the papers of a man I came across the following endings — so gushing, so overflowing with bonhomie and all that sort of thing

“Believe me, yours faithfully,”

“Many thanks of yours — ”

“With many thanks, believe me much obliged to you. Yours sincerely,”

“My best compliments and thanks, believe me yours,”

“And thanking in anticipation here remain yours,”

We do not want anything so sugary or ornamental as these endings in our business letters

Writers of short stories and articles do not labour after the obvious. Their writings end naturally, sometimes abruptly. They bring the reader to a point and leave him there — not stranded but in understanding of the conclusion. Some articles are hardly longer than a business letter but there is no attempt to round them off with some formal conclusion.

The business letter writer is not going to lose anything, nor need he fear offending his reader, by knocking off the last paragraph tendering thanks in advance (or some such thing). On the contrary, he will rid himself of the stigma of hypocrisy and will improve his letters immensely. If he is bent on giving

his attention and service, he can prove it by his actions. he can show his appreciation by using suitable language. If he thinks he must unburden himself of certain sentiments, let him do so cleverly in the body of his letter, but let him not use the awkward, ungainly ending phrase

## CHAPTER VIII

### MIXED FREIGHT

---

**M**ANY people adopt tortuous ways of saying things. Here are a few examples of long-windedness.

"The favour of your kindly paying this bill within a week is solicited." (13 words)

Condense to -

"Please pay this bill within a week." (7 words)

"I have pleasure to request you to kindly arrange to despatch the below-mentioned goods by V. P. P. at an early date." (An official of the Agricultural Department)

This is mere verbiage. Mark "pleasure to request" (pleasure in requesting), "arrange to despatch" (send), "below mentioned" (following), "at an early date" (early), also the split infinitive ("to kindly arrange")

"With reference to your post card for the return of the blocks pertaining to your advertisement in \_\_\_\_\_, I have pleasure in sending you under separate cover 5 blocks and shall be obliged if you will kindly acknowledge receipt in due course.

I am sending the blocks by railway parcel and enclose herewith a railway receipt."

( 58 words )

### My version

"Reference your post card of the : the 5 blocks of your advertisement have been returned to you today by passenger train. I am enclosing the railway receipt.

Please acknowledge."

( 30 words )

It is a habit with some people to begin a letter without adequate thought. The following examples will show how necessary it is to think out a letter before writing it.

The principal of a girls' school wrote --

"Sir,

I enclose a small order for seeds. I shall be glad if you will please let me have them at your earliest possible opportunity.

Please send the parcel per V. P. P.

Yours truly,"

( 30 words )

It would have been simpler to say --

"Dear Sir,

Please send early the seeds mentioned in the enclosed list by V. P. P.

Yours faithfully,"

( 12 words )

This letter was addressed to a firm Therefore, observe the salutation and complimentary close in the lady's letter.

"I am sorry to note that most of the seed packets sent to .. were opened by me and sown in a good red loamy soil in the school garden "

The writer is sorry about the failure of the seeds ( as he proceeds to say ), but he makes a hasty ( and wrong ) beginning and makes no effort to correct it

### Correction piece

Some people have a passion for stringing together high-sounding words A well-known firm of jewellers has printed this letter in many of its advertisements —

" It gives me great pleasure to record that purchasing diamonds has been rendered easy by you *I was often very vehemently told that a mandering process has to be gone through for getting best diamonds for a fair price by giving a chance to the various dealers to decry one another's goods for helping us to make up our minds to choose* I deliberately ignored this method for the simple reason that amidst every dealer's criticism of others' goods, a layman like me who cannot see for himself easily the 'distinctions' elaborated by the 'experts' can escape



*confusion* only by not purchasing at all .. I am particularly indebted to you for the very responsible way in which you have reciprocated my confidence "

And now let us turn to one or two good letters.

" Dear .

Haven't you sometimes wished that you could devote some more time and loving care to your garden ? Every true garden-lover has sometimes this guilty—though erroneous—thought that he is not giving as much time and labour to his plants as he should

Of course the fault is not yours. The garden is always in your thoughts You put every spare moment into it. But you have business to attend to, some urgent or pressing work that engulfs all your time

At such moments you wish that you could relegate your duties to a competent man or agency. You have tried maids but they have not satisfied you

Why not give us a chance to tend your garden ? We promise to give to it as much attention and care as you would. We have the right qualifications, the right experience, the right men this kind of job needs. We understand plants and know what they want

We only ask for an opportunity to prove this to you. Let us discuss this question with you. Just send us the enclosed post card and a man will call at *your* house or office at the time most suitable to *you*. There is absolutely no obligation.

Maybe, together we can arrive at some arrangement whereby your garden can be maintained in just that state you have always loved it to be in.

Yours truly, "

### **Bright Stuff**

Writing letters demanding payment of old accounts gives the creeps to many businessmen. They can learn a few things from the following letter issued by the American magazine *Nature*. It is a fine example of friendly, persuasive and inoffensive writing. The letter is suitably illustrated in two colours and is as pleasant to see as it is to read.

"Dear Member -

Carrying around a lighted lantern night and day in China—after the New Year—indicates that the lantern bearer has overlooked some of his last year's accounts.

Strange people the Chinese, still holding on to the habits and customs of thousands of years back—but this special planning to start the New

Year with a clean sheet, is not a custom of which the Chinese have a monopoly. Lots of us like to clean up our small bills round the end of the year.

How about yourself? We are going to suggest that NOW would be a good time to get your renewal to Nature Magazine fixed up for another year. NOW would be a good time to ensure continuance of the enjoyment and information Nature Magazine provides. The best nature writers, artists and photographers will continue to make each issue a well-written, beautifully illustrated and highly entertaining book you will love to read and hold for its permanent value

Here's an envelope—a little token of your account above—and our best wishes to you for a Prosperous and Happy New Year

Yours very truly,

Note — If your subscription was recently renewed, kindly disregard this memo except for our wishes for your prosperity and happiness."

## CHAPTER IX

# OVERWORKED WORDS

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“**I**N this feature, our contributor supplies to our readers, from week to week, useful little domestic hints, ideas and suggestions — *Editor*” — A Bombay weekly paper

Hints, yes Suggestions, yes But I do not understand the word “ideas” in this context

The dictionary meaning of idea is “an image or conception of a thing in the mind”, something “which is held or comprehended by the understanding or intellectual faculties”

Thus an idea has much to do with imagination and mental visualising. It is something high and lofty

Yet the word idea through over-work, ill treatment and wrong usage has been reduced to the condition of a serf It is made to do duty for several other words — words which if used in their proper surroundings are better fitted for their several functions than the word idea Consider the following examples

- 1 "The idea occurred to me that you might help "  
"Put down your ideas on paper."

*Thought.*

2. "He could give me no idea why he took this step"

*Reason or explanation.*

3. "The idea is that 'A' will take this corner and 'B' that"

*Plan or scheme.*

4. "Our idea is to bring out a book."

*Intention.*

5. "What is the idea of placing this on my table?"

*Meaning*

- 6 "Many people have the idea that it is not wrong to cheat at cards."

*Belief.*

7. "Foreigners have the idea that Indians are a slothful race."

*Opinion or impression.*

8. "Readers' ideas are invited "

*Suggestions.*

- 9 "Have you any idea where So-and-So is?"  
*Knowledge.* Or simply, "Do you know where So-and-So is?"

10 "An idea of the immensity of the task can be gained from "

Here, in my opinion, the word is correctly used, because we are asked to make a mental picture of the immensity of the task. But the word fails to impress because the real meaning is no longer recognisable. Wherever possible, use variants like notion, conception, thought. Try always to use the right word.

The letter writer must make it a duty to steer clear of overworked words like idea. He must also try to understand the precise meanings of words so that he can make himself clearly understood and be able to write forceful letters.

## Quite

Quite is another misused and overworked word. You will be surprised to know that quite means "very, completely, entirely." I say surprised because almost everybody says quite to express various shades of "good" - e.g., "fair", "fairly good", "not bad", "just so so", "nothing to make a song about".

Some people employ quite in order to be non-committal in their opinions. "How did you find our sample?" "Oh, quite good", meaning not very good but not bad either. It-will-do sort of thing. Sometimes they may be vague in their minds and say "quite passable" or "quite workable" in relation to a thing when they are not sure what to say. Won't

they be surprised when they learn that they thus give emphatic opinions — *very* good, *entirely* workable, and so on?

### **Funny**

Another habit is to call anything that is odd, curious, queer or fantastic, funny. Now funny means droll or comical—no more and no less.

"He has rather a funny way of holding his pen" Actually there may not be anything comical in the way the man holds his pen, but it may be odd or uncommon.

Suppose you write an article on curious accidents, and suppose, because you are in the habit of saying funny you name your article "Funny Accidents". What will happen? Your article will come back. An accident is no fun, yet I have heard people calling accidents funny, not because they mean that accidents are funny, but because they can think of no other word.

So get rid of funny.

### **Unique**

Another misused word Unique means "without a like or equal in kind or quality". Thus, I will call the Taj Mahal unique, but if a businessman knocks twenty-five per cent off his prices, nothing will convince me that he is making a "unique offer". The Bible is certainly unique, but I will hesitate to call a novel, even if it is a great work of art, unique

People say unique when they mean no more than remarkable, novel or extraordinary. Next time you are tempted to write unique in your correspondence, remember unique gives the sense of *one and no more* and think of some other adjective

## Very

Any dictionary will tell you that very means in a great, eminent or high degree, but not generally the highest. From such phrases as "We are very grateful for your offer", "We have considered your prices very carefully", "Thank you very much for your letter", knock off very. Be chary in the use of this word. Use it sparingly and only when occasion demands, in order to express the right shade of opinion or feeling. You will be agreeably surprised to find that you can get on wonderfully well without this word, that your letters will not suffer either in clarity or forcefulness because of its absence.

## Sensation

"Sensational Price Reductions"

"Sensational Clothes Bargains"

"We beg to hand you our leaflet describing our sensational new offer."

What is sensation? It means "perception by the senses, an impression on the mind or the brain by means of the senses." I am unable to understand what any price reduction, or bargain, or offer, or any-



thing to which the word sensation is applied (see any issue of any paper or magazine to come across sensation or sensational) has to do with perception by the senses.

By our utterly wrong use of this word we have confounded its meaning, twisted it out of shape. Let us resolve to stop mangling this word and others and in course of time we shall be able to put the most apposite words in their proper settings.

See the "idea" ?

## CHAPTER X

### CLERKISMS

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**I**F it is true that we unconsciously reproduce in writing habits and mannerisms of speech, then there is justification for this chapter. There is no justification, however, for the new coinage—clerkisms—except that of expediency.

There are certain forms of expression which have become so established that they sometimes creep into written language. Many people are addicted to them—not excluding highly-placed business executives—but the addiction is strongly prevalent in the ranks of the “white-collar” gentry. Hence clerkisms.

Let us take a few examples

#### **Which all, What all**

Somewhere I have referred to *which all* and *what all*. Whatever the merits of these expressions as substitutes for all that, what or whatever, in speech (it is foolish to expect Indians to converse like English university men), their use in written English is inexcusable. In your business letters avoid them as you would avoid the boss at the race course.

## Ups and Downs

I often wonder why people add a quite unnecessary up or down in conversation and writing.

"I went while he was dressing up" can only mean that the dresser first put on his shoes, then his socks, his pants, his shirt, his coat, his collar and tie and finally his hat, or that he was dressing upstairs and not on the ground floor. No, I am not joking, but that is precisely what "up" conveys. Is not dressing enough?

"We are enclosing a statement which please check up with your books." How often do we read this! Yet how often do we think that "up" is unnecessary?

"Our Mr. Bang is coming down to Bombay to meet your Mr. Bust" Fairly common—this sort of thing. But down is wrong and so is coming. If you ask the railway people they will tell you that when you go to Bombay, you are going UP—that does not mean, however, that you should substitute up for down.

Kick Messrs Up and Down out of your letter writing as you would your neighbour's troublesome cat.

## Only

Many people seem to be greatly fond of "only". Whether it is necessary or not, they will use it. Its position in a sentence is hardly ever correct. Listen to these typical conversations.

"Who told you I was given a

"The boss *only* "

"Where did you put that book ? "

"There *only*."

The habit of using "only" indiscriminately is annoying Try to get rid of it.

### **This thing and that thing**

This is a favourite with many. When words fail this expression comes in handy It is unlovely to the ear as well as to the sight It is supposed to stand for a multitude of factors or reasons, or whatever it is one is concerned with, in a vague sort of way. Try to find the right word or phrase for what you want to convey Break this lazy habit of generalising with "this thing and that thing."

### **Stitched**

"I got this coat *stitched* recently *only*."

"Babu's father *made* this suit for fifty rupees "

One may (or may not) be in the tailoring business, but it is good for him to know that we *get* clothes *made* or *sewn* Babu's father did not make the suit himself, but he got his tailor to make it.

### **Gentleman**

It is problematical whether if you call a man a gentleman he becomes a gentleman But without

doubt it is wrong to address a man by word as "Gentleman" I say this because too often I have heard people hailing an acquaintance as "Hello, gentleman!" or, "Well, my dear gentleman, how do you do?" Gentlemen is correct, but not gentleman

## Meals

Suppose you go to work late one day (as many of us do though we may not acknowledge it) and your employer asks your reason for being late Do not say, "Sir, I was having meals "

"Having meals" is an odd clerkism. If you must use the word "meals", use it in the singular. Obviously, you can "have" only one meal at one time because meal means "food taken statedly at one time". I prefer take to have So you may say, "Sir, I was taking my meal" Better still, say breakfast or lunch or tiffin (another favourite clerkism), or whatever it is you were eating.

## Suppose if, in case if; has got

Very common "If," according to the dictionary, means, "supposing that, in case that " Therefore, "if" must stand alone and never with "suppose " or "in case "

This reminds me that many are in the habit of saying "has got," "have got," when it is enough to say "has". "Got" sounds ugly to the ear Don't say, "We have got six dozen cases of Paleface Soap",

but "We have six dozen cases " "Have you *got* Smootho Safety Razor?" can well be "Do you have (or sell, or stock) Smootho?"

The clerk who wishes to be noticed, who wishes to rise, must try to free (not try *and* free) his language of such uncouth and ungrammatical words and phrases as have been recorded here. Once he begins to notice these barbarians and to chase them out, it will not be long before his writing becomes dignified and polished

CHAPTER XI

QUOTH THE BABU

OR

HOW NOT TO WRITE LETTERS

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FOR the amusement of my readers I have collected from various sources some examples of "Babu" letters. Similar letters are being written every day, as every official and businessman knows. Therefore, the examples given here furnish instruction in addition to amusement.

Incidentally, consider how the word *babu* has undergone a change in meaning. The dictionary defines *babu* as "a title of respect to a gentleman among Hindus". But the humorists have poked such fun at babus that the word now signifies a half-literate man, a quill-driver of the humblest sort, a man given to making howlers of the funniest kind.

Here is a letter typical of him—

Dear Sirs,

Please send me one katlick for automoticles and sykles on the hairy purchase system, and all things dito. Also send prices for watches and

pens and garments for wife Please put small charge since I am troublesome marrid man and got it little money and plenty childs Also send katlick for other things. Have you got socks and boots and shoe? I am waiting eager for an early date

I remain for your honer

The Indian babu has brothers in other lands For instance, read the application addressed to the editor of a Malayan paper

Dear Sir, very honoured and respected,

I asking for job, I can do any kind of works by virtue of my flexible brain and very advanced training I passed matriculation in a very large college in

The flexible brain that I have in my possession will bend towards any kind of works your honour yoking on me. I mathematics passing very good credit, making very good machine-like work, modern calculating machine simply eclipsed by my brain English I passing with credits so I can be burdened with correspondence writing

If your honour will be good enough to employ me, I will in duty bound always pray for your honour's long life. My prayers have always been heard as I always pray very loud If wanting my



services I can come suddenly. Putting myself at your honour's large feet, I pray to become your honour's humble and faithful servant

And here is one from a Chinaman to a financial house in Peking

Dear Sir,

I am Wang. It is for my personal benefit that I write for a position in your honourable Bank.

I have a flexible brain that will adapt itself to your business and in consequence bring good efforts to your goodselves. My education was impressed upon me in the Peking University at which place I graduated Number One.

I can drive a typewriter with good noise and my English is great

My references are of good and should you hope to see me they will be read by you with great pleasure

My last job has left itself from me for the good reason that the large man has dead. It was on account of no fault of mine. So, honourable Sir, what about it? If I can be of big use to you, I will arrive on some date that you should guess

Faithfully yours,  
Wang

That the babu is not without a strong ~~inventive~~ <sup>5</sup> ~~inventive~~ faculty can be seen from the following application received at the Port Office, Basrah—

Dears,

I favourably beg to let you know that in any possibility to occupy me with a job if you know the mankind in the world that the one should be helped by the others

If your goodselves ignorant that you have been named forgotten God what mentioned.

In any way requesting the aid always to content me for the God sake and saying work while you work and play while you play and secondly a handful in hand better than most at absent.

Thanking you if my wish be completed by your favoured consideration

Please dont loose my chat in vain and let go away at the wind

Yours obdt.

Read again "A handful in hand better than most at absent" and "Dont loose my chat in vain and let go away at the wind", and you have two capital proverbs introduced into the English language!

## CHAPTER XII

### CONSIDERING THE OTHER FELLOW

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IT must not be forgotten that the letter is one's written representative. It suffers from certain drawbacks which it must be the business of the letter writer to overcome. You can never know in what mood the receiver of your letter will be. If he is annoyed with something, he will read a meaning into your letter which you did not intend. The written word sounds harsh and stiff. What one can convey orally by tone, inflection of voice, demeanour, gesture... the letter cannot do. Therefore, there is all the more reason why the writer of a business letter must be watchful of what and how he writes.

Far too many people make the mistake of drafting their letters so as to please themselves, with never a thought for the effect of their letters upon the reader. One should adopt the attitude of the diaryist: most people write their diaries with an eye on posterity, fondly hoping that one day their diaries will be published. In the same way the letter writer must keep his reader not far away from his thoughts.

He must ask himself Will my letter annoy the receiver, offend him, tire him, make him laugh because he thinks my letter is silly, bring him in a cheerful state of mind, make him trust in my honesty or intelligence, induce him to give me business ?

Some time ago I saw in an American magazine a publisher's advertisement of books priced at 25c each. The list given contained names of several popular books. I chose the names of a few out of this list and asked a bookseller by letter whether he kept these books for sale He answered —

“ I regret none of the pocket books published in New York mentioned in your enquiry are available here at present. May I send you any other books ? Thanking you in anticipation . . ”

Now, he could have easily added a few lines to recommend other publishers' editions of the same books He threw away that opportunity and made me think poorly of his sense of business. He even irritated me — so much so that I restrained the impulse to write to him again This businessman not only lost an order which he would perhaps have received, he created an impression of doing things by half, of not taking enough trouble to satisfy his customers The intelligent letter writer must be a salesman. He must anticipate the question “ But if you don't have this, do you have something else to suit my needs ? ” and act accordingly.

A mail-order firm received a letter from a customer who complained that she had received three napkins short. The firm wrote back, "We do not know how this could have happened. Our records show that all articles were sent according to your order. However, it is quite possible that these three napkins were left out while packing and so we are sending them again free."

I don't like this letter. By referring to its records the firm tries to show how smart it is—yet it makes mistakes! The assertion that all articles were *sent* according to order seems to cast an aspersion on the customer as if she is making a false complaint. And if all articles were "sent", how is it "possible" that three napkins were left out? Doesn't it sound contradictory and ridiculous? In my opinion, where a mistake has been committed, the right course is to acknowledge it rather than attempt to find an excuse for it.

The editor of a magazine had made an arrangement with an insurance company by which the company contributed an article every month and in return got a small announcement free of charge. This arrangement continued satisfactorily for some time until a new editor came who, without notice or word of explanation, abruptly stopped publishing the contributions. After a month the insurance company wrote for a voucher copy and asked whether the second part of its latest article had been published.

The answer received was staggering. The editor wrote to say that unless the company took a quarter-page advertisement its article would not be published

The editor completely ignored the fact that it was his predecessor who had asked for articles (which were not paid for) and who, as a measure of his gratitude, had allotted a small space for a free announcement. The new man was thus unaccountably rude and unbusinesslike. By one stroke of the pen he broke off pleasant relations. It must be the aim of every letter writer to maintain good relations and to make new friends. On no account must he make enemies of friends. It behoves him to be careful in whatever he says and does and he must always remember that one does not lose anything by being polite. What one can gain by persuasion and an appeal to reason, he can never gain by threats

Some people are finical in the matter of their degrees and titles, others in the way their names are spelt. If one has socialistic opinions, a business letter is no place to air them. In business we cannot afford to offend anybody needlessly. If a man is proud of his degrees or titles, humour him. If there is a hyphen in his name, be careful to see that you do not omit that hyphen. Do not forget other people's idiosyncrasies, do not needlessly tread on other people's corns. The other fellow may be a snob but you will prove yourself a gentleman if you refrain from giving him offence

Occasionally the letter writer may receive a letter that is downright rude and offensive. He may be tempted to send a sizzling reply, to hit back with interest. But he must keep himself in control. If he must give vent to his feelings, let him draft a reply and then sleep over it. By next morning he will have cooled and will be glad he did not send that stiff letter after all. Possibly the other fellow has some reason for his rudeness, some grouse, some really serious complaint to make. At such a moment it will never do to be hasty. A hot reply may lose the writer a client. Remembr that just as a satisfied customer is an excellent advertisement, a man whom you have failed to placate or whom you have driven to enmity may do you much harm.

I know that often inexperienced clerks take delight in saying "How I gave him!" meaning thereby how well (or ill!) they snubbed the other fellow. One has to deal with all classes and types of people. Some are in the habit of making vexatious complaints; some are so intolerant as to dash off their feelings in violent terms on the slightest provocation — real or imaginary; some others are not ill-natured but are merely hasty in reading things or are faulty in understanding. The letter writer has a great temptation to point out the other man's mistake, to indulge in the I-told-you-so attitude, to lay to his heart the satisfying unction of his own righteousness or freedom from error. The danger is that the man who is ordinarily reasonable is apt to be stubborn when his

mistake is pointed out to him, he is likely to stick to his point even if he is wrong. Therefore, the temptation to have a dig at the other fellow and thus make him feel a fool must be severely curbed. If one *has* to point out a mistake there are ways and ways of doing so.

I know a businessman who is in the habit of writing long letters. He examines even comparatively trivial matters from various angles and makes his communication a treatise rather than a letter. Where a principle has to be expounded, an explanation to be given or some knotty question to be unravelled, it is permissible to write at length. Nobody likes to read long letters. Do not tire your reader. Avoid being a bore.

The business letter writer must carefully read the correspondence he is answering. It is annoying to anybody to receive either an irrelevant reply or a letter that leaves certain questions unanswered. It is not merely annoying but wasteful of time and money. And it may often happen that a valuable order may be lost. A man who is in a hurry will hardly wait to write back in order to get some point cleared, he is more likely to drop the matter in exasperation and disgust and go somewhere else. Therefore, one's letters must be full and apposite.

Many clerks who are new to their work commit the mistake of making their letters literary in style.



The zeal of a graduate to show to his employer how well up he is in English is pardonable, but it must be remembered that a business letter is not an essay. There is no room for frills, the pretty turn of phrase. A business letter serves for a conversation, therefore the language must be simple and direct. Businessmen are hard-headed fellows who consider any attempt at being literary in business correspondence merely laughable. Make your sonorous period as scarce as a padre in a nudist colony.

Keep your sentences within limits I give below two examples of involved sentences

"It is a matter of deep regret to me that Government have not been able to *appreciate* the Congress position, meant just to satisfy the bare requirements of the people, whether Congressmen or others, who felt a conscientious objection to helping a war to which they were never invited and which they regard, so far as they are concerned, as one for serving Imperialism, of which India is the greatest victim." - Mr. Gandhi to the Viceroy, 30-9-40.

(Appreciate - Understand?)

"His broad-browed massive head covered with rich hirsute growth that to some seemed awe-inspiring was really full of genuine sympathy for the poor, which had broadened considerably a couple of years before his death when he had

the misfortune to lose one of his brothers and his only son, who was cut off in the prime of his life." – A writer in a Bombay paper.

(*Asides* – What was awe-inspiring, the head or the hirsute growth? Genuine sympathy, etc. – does sympathy lie in the head or the heart?)

## CHAPTER XIII

### HAVE A HEART, BOSS!

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**M**ANY employers expect their clerks to turn out good work when they do nothing to provide the clerks with comfortable conditions of work. Physical discomfort is a constant source of irritation. This irritation may leave one with a sense of wrong and injustice or put him in a bad mood—neither of which is conducive to good letter writing.

In one firm the store-keeper had his office near the lavatories of the building. The smell emanating drove this man frantic until, representations to the employer having failed to bring any redress, he had to resign in sheer desperation.

In another office some of the tables are too high for the chairs. Those unfortunate men who have to work at them place either old papers or small deal-wood boxes, in the absence of cushions, on their chairs so as to adjust themselves to the heights of the tables. Imagine anybody producing good work when he has to sit on a hard surface eight to ten hours a day!

In yet another office a man was obliged to work under a tin roof. Though during the summer months

he felt almost stifled by the heat, he had to carry on—while, of course, the boss sat under a fan. Instances are not unknown of men being driven to wear spectacles because of the bad lighting under which they worked

Good and comfortable furniture, good lighting, good ventilation are some of the elementary rights of employees. But there are some old-fashioned, heartless, stingy employers who get incensed at the thought of their subordinates having any rights. They believe that any conditions are good enough for their workers and yet expect first-class work

It is also the duty of employers to provide their workers with good drinking water, good dining arrangements, good closets—everything, in fact, which keeps the workers comfortable and in a cheerful state of mind.

There is an impression abroad that clerical labour does not involve any physical strain. Some people think that to bang a typewriter, or to sit on a chair, or to bend over a table for hours on end means nothing. This is a wrong impression. Clerical labour is exhausting—it not only involves physical strain but mental strain as well. There comes a time in the day of any office worker when his energies flag, when his brain refuses to function, when he begins to make mistakes. A typist will go wrong in his letters, a figure-worker will make errors in his calculations.

Unfortunately, employers fail to recognise or understand this factor of fatigue and brand their workers with inefficiency.

Among industrial labourers it has been proved by scientific research that what is called "industrial fatigue" invariably leads to physical strain, decreased efficiency, boredom and absent-mindedness which sometimes result in accidents and tend to have an adverse effect on the quality and quantity of output. In many industries suitable breaks in the day's routine are devised so as to give the workers a pause for rest.

It must not be overlooked that office workers also deserve breaks in their day's routine. In industrial establishments where the principles of scientific management are recognised and followed, the workers are provided by the employers with free tea during the break periods, in some factories the employers have established canteens where tea is sold cheaply. There is no reason why office workers should not be allowed the same facilities of a rest pause and a cup of tea.

I write on the authority of the Indian Tea Market-Expansion Board that "the necessity of compulsory 'breaks' of this nature finally received the recognition of British legislators in the new Factory Act which came into force in July 1938. Not in Britain alone, but also in other parts of the world, the benefit of a rest pause with tea are now enjoyed by all classes of labour—factory, mine, farm and office."

To those employers who are inclined to treat their office staffs like dirt, I commend these remarks. If they do not straightaway proceed to provide tea to their men, I hope they will learn to be tolerant, learn to understand that the human body and brain have their limits, that the cause of many faults in work can often be traced to fatigue.

With physical comfort must go mental comfort. No man can produce his best if he constantly lives in a state of fear — fear of his employer, fear of losing his job. Nor can he have the right mental attitude conducive to good work if he is degraded and humiliated at every turn. Unfortunately there is a tendency among bosses to shout at their men, to rate them for small faults, to treat them with contempt. They are apt to believe that they are doing the greatest favour to their men by employing them, forgetting that what they are doing is merely buying their men's services—very often at low prices. The point is that for better work—whether it is adding up a column of figures or writing business letters—a happy and cheerful frame of mind is necessary.

Some employers, though not unkindly, are excessively critical and finical to a degree. Their habit of finding fault even in trivial matters is irritating and produces a state of nervousness in those who work under them. An employer's attitude should always be helpful rather than merely critical. If he has reason to reject a letter let him point out why, rather than score through it and ask his clerk to do it again.

Clever and experienced people are apt to be impatient and intolerant of the shortcomings of those who are less intelligent and less experienced. They raise themselves on a pedestal and look on others with scorn. If harmony between the employer and employed and better work are desired, this impulse to regard with contempt others who are below one's standard of intelligence and competence needs to be curbed.

A business executive who changes his mind frequently is not only a bad example to his subordinates, but is also the cause of much irritation and wastage of time. Where, as in Government offices, it is the practice of correspondence clerks to submit drafts for approval, it is essential that the executive who reads them should give them proper thought and then pass them. If he puts his initials to the drafts and then makes corrections or additions to the finished letters, thus necessitating retyping, he is inviting criticism upon himself. Often the subordinates may become hostile and careless in their work.

To those who dictate letters it may be suggested that all the points going in a reply should be first thought out carefully, then arrayed in the mind in their proper sequence; finally dictated clearly and unambiguously. Where verbal instructions are given, for God's sake give the clerk a chance to read the letter which is to be answered. Do not just rattle off what you wish to say and then shove the letter into the clerk's hand. It sometimes happens that the clerk

may read a different meaning into the letter or he may come across one or two points which you have not touched. He will then be perplexed to know what to write, what to add and what to leave out.

Do not allow your emotions to influence your verbal instructions. If you are angry or annoyed, whether with the outside world or with the writer of the letter you are reading, give yourself time to cool before you instruct the clerk. There is risk that the clerk may take you seriously and sincerely interpret the tone and manner of your speaking. When the finished letter comes before you, you will find it a bit too stiff. Result rejection and retyping.

Where a letter is on an important subject, the facts of which are known only to you, take the trouble to explain the facts to the clerk. He will then understand better what he has to write. Give your instructions clearly, carefully and precisely and say what to include and what not to. If you do this, there will be no need to add post scripts or to make ugly-looking corrections in ink. If the letter is an important one which you want written in a particular way, it is better to dictate it. The intelligent clerk must be allowed to make changes in grammar and construction. A carping, why-didn't-you-write-as-I-told-you sort of attitude breaks the clerk's initiative, destroys his confidence in himself. After all, he is acting not out of personal vanity but in the interests of his firm.



## CHAPTER XIV

### EFFICIENCY AIDS

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DEVICES which save time, increase efficiency, and help to bring more business must always be welcome. We are all familiar with the printed forms and letters dealing with routine matters which save a good deal of the typists' time. In almost every business there are some matters which require no elaboration in their disposal. these can be dealt with by means of printed cards or letters.

Rubber stamps are used in a variety of ways. Their main object is to cut down work and to save time. Though rubber stamps meet many needs, it is rarely possible to foresee all the needs. A new order issued by the head of the office, some change or addition in the manner of keeping records, may give rise to work – often tedious and laborious – of a purely routine nature. This work can be adequately done with the help of rubber stamps. Beware, however, of multiplying them to an alarming extent.

A clerk in a certain office is in the habit of writing out in full the following direction to the correspondence department:– "This information is for office use

only and not for reply." When it is considered that he has to write this direction on several letters in a day, the time he spends can well be imagined. A neat rubber stamp saying "Office Note" or "Office Note-Not for reply" will do the trick and save a lot of time.

This is merely an example to show to what extent time and labour can be saved by the exercise of a little intelligence—and imagination.

Paper in various sizes, shapes and colours can be made to serve in a number of ways. Many business letters deserve special attention or treatment. Coloured paper flags of stiff board should be printed with appropriate markings— "Urgent", "Very Urgent", "Rush Order", "Dr.", "Cr.", "After Reply Pass on to — — — Dept.", "Consult Mr. — — —" and so on, insure that letters receive the right treatment, that

no point is overlooked, that a claim against the firm or an account to be settled does not get filed away.

Progressive business houses are nowadays making use of the gummed slip or sticker. A familiar sticker is the one reminding about an outstanding account. There are other uses.

<p><b>PERSONAL ATTENTION</b></p> <p><i>When telephoning please ask for —</i></p> <p><b>Mr. Goodman</b> <i>who is dealing with this matter</i></p> <p><i>When writing please attach this reference slip to your reply.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">A</p> <p><b>S. J. K.</b></p>
---

A writer in *Indian Print and Paper* recommends the

"Personal Attention Slip". This slip not only gives the name of the writer of the letter, but has a perforated section which may be torn off and attached by the receiver to his reply. This device enables one to get in touch with the right person, the perforated slip carries the reply to the right quarter.

The writer suggests further uses, a few of which I reproduce.

"Nothing is more irritating in these days of business pressure than to be held up on the telephone waiting for a connection. How much worse is this unhappy state of affairs when the operator informs you that the number has been changed. How simple it would have been for your delinquent subscriber to have advised all his clients that his telephone number had been changed. Here is another excellent opportunity to let the gummed sticker convey the message for you simply and inexpensively by affixing a slip to correspondence.

"It is possible to save your customer the trouble of looking up your name and address, as he sometimes has to do, when he wishes to write to you, by issuing him a booklet of gummed labels, printed with your name and address, which he may affix to the envelopes. He will appreciate your effort and you may hear from him more frequently. This is another way of making it easy for your customers to get in touch with you.

"Let your customer know of any revision in prices, alteration in discounts, new method of packing your products, and, above all, let him know what you sell and the service you are able to give him. He will not always trouble to find out for himself, and unexpected increases in prices do not always leave the way clear for further business. A gummed sticker can do all these things for you without any additional announcement or special letter.

"Christmastide and other seasonable greetings can be conveyed to customers by means of the sticker. Appropriate stock designs are easily procurable, although the more personal, specially printed message is preferable.

"These are only a few of the many services the gummed sticker can perform, but mention here serves the purpose of pointing out how time can be saved and efficiency increased by the judicious use of an attention-drawing medium which deserves to be exploited to its fullest capacity."

Our object is to make our letters go the farthest possible. They should serve our interests and the interests of those with whom we deal. Nothing that helps us in this object should be scorned. Everything that goes to increase promptness, efficiency, brightness.. should be welcomed.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SIGNING OF LETTERS

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WHERE the volume of outgoing correspondence does not permit the signing of letters by the head of the office, this important function is often delegated to one or two responsible officials. For instance, in a large company the signing may be done by the departmental heads, or in a proprietary firm by the manager or some other person appointed for the purpose. Heavy responsibility lies upon those who do the signing because, in spite of the greatest care, mistakes do occasionally creep in, particularly so when those who write the correspondence are of less than average intelligence or ability.

Among routine matters the signer of letters must see that the date, address, salutation and complimentary close are correct. The date is usually always overlooked, but it has its importance. In a lawsuit it may be of vital importance. Particular care needs to be taken at the changing of a month or year.

The inside address also needs to be watched. Is it a firm to be addressed or an official? If a private

person, is his name properly spelt ? Are his degrees or titles properly given ? Is the post town correct ? And so on.

Since usually always letters bear numbers to facilitate reference, care must be taken to see that these numbers with their dates are quoted correctly. If a letter bears a heading or subject in addition to a reference number, this too must be repeated, because it helps reference and quick disposal.

Figures and price quotations need careful checking. A mistake here may land the firm in serious difficulty. When there are telegrams to be confirmed, the wording must be carefully compared. In short, a watchful eye on all statements of fact and figure is an essential part of the letter signer's work.

Where the person signing usually puts his own signature at the bottom of the letter, it is preferable that the signature be also typed. The signature of most people is merely a scrawl. It helps in the establishment of personal contact and in bringing about better understanding if it is indicated who actually deals with the letters.

Where there are envelopes accompanying letters the addresses on them must be carefully checked. The brain plays queer tricks, particularly when one is tired, and so typists are apt to make footling mistakes in typing addresses. I have experience of not a few mistakes. Care should be taken to see that

names and numbers of buildings, streets and roads are properly given, that the post town is correct, that sufficient help is given to the postman by adding the names of districts and provinces.

The person who signs letters must go through the letters which are being answered in order to see that no points are left out, and that when all points are answered, there is nothing vague or indefinite in the reply. It is common experience to receive letters which do not reply to your questions, which leave things only half said, which are ambiguous in their meaning.

Very often people will state or ask one or two things and expect you to fill the gap. Illogically enough they will be annoyed if you fail to read their minds. Therefore, the signer must bear the additional burden of doing a little thinking, a little drill in psychology. He must ask himself, "Will he be satisfied with this answer? If I were in his place, what else would I expect to know?" This ability to do the thinking for the other fellow will often be rewarded.

The signer must also be a salesman. It is a trite saying that every letter must be a business-getter, but it is true. No opportunity should be lost to bring to the other man's notice some form of service or goods you would like him to be acquainted with. Make suggestions, push forth other lines if you are run out of the particular one desired, be helpful, and

show that you are as eager to serve as to do business

Be watchful of the tone of the letters the typists place before you. The aim should be courtesy before everything else. Nothing should be passed that is likely to cause offence or bickering. After all, you are signing for the firm and the firm should be foremost in your mind, not your personal predilections or prejudices.

The letters that go out must be in conformity with the firm's policy and methods of business. It would be fatal to assume responsibility or initiative for which you have no sanction. If the typist has made a statement without proper authority, wait and get the authority before signing the letter. A friend of mine once stopped a dunning letter to a customer merely because of a remark the typist let slip. The customer turned out to be an intimate acquaintance of the boss and so the letter was scrapped and one in a friendly and personal tone was substituted. Back came the answer that the account had been forgotten and the bills lost, would he be given some time to pay? The point is that had that dunning letter been passed, quite unnecessary annoyance and bitterness of feeling, and perhaps straining of relations, would have been created.

It may sound trivial but the letter signer must be very watchful of mistakes in spelling and grammar, omission of words and so on. It is the impression formed by your letter that counts and when the reader sees that you spend time, trouble and attention to



make your letters as faultless as possible, he begins to have a respect for you and to think that his business dealings will also receive the same expenditure of time, trouble and attention.

However cautious the signer may be, it is essential that he must receive the co-operation of the correspondence clerks. The office must insist upon the correspondence clerks going over their letters carefully for corrections of mistakes before sending them for signature. Otherwise the signer's work becomes a burden and a drudgery and he, not unnaturally, often misses the wood for the trees.

## CHAPTER XVI

### YOU MIGHT LIKE TO KNOW THESE

---

ONE often comes across letters faultless in construction and grammar but marred by mistakes in breaking up of words, in abbreviations and so on. For the guidance of the intelligent letter writer I give here a few rules culled from guide books for printers.

#### **Dividing "Children" :**

"Webster and Standard agree on 'chil-dren'. The word is universally pronounced in those two syllables. Teacher, calling her class to order, does not say 'child-ren'. People sometimes write it that way, with the idea, presumably, of preserving the word 'child' as a distinct element in it. Such division at the end of a line may not impede the reader's progress at all, but if it does make any difference to him, it is never as an acceleration but always as an impediment to the progress of his mind in picking up the writer's thought. Division before the 'd' is right, after it is wrong."

I have purposely quoted this example to suggest that one's notions of the division of words at the end

of a line may well be revised, incidentally, no office should be complete without a good dictionary.

The use of more than two consecutive divisions should be discouraged. One-syllable words are never divided. Do not break the second element of a compound word. A one-letter division is absolutely wrong. Do not divide a proper name if it can be avoided. A divided word in a heading mars the heading's appearance.

### Abbreviations

Errors are frequently made in the writing of abbreviations. For example,

Company	should be	Co	not	Coy.
Limited	„ „	Ltd.	„	Ld
Manufacturing	„ „	Mfg.	„	Mafg.
Honorary	„ „	Hon.	„	Hony.
Secretary	„ „	Sec.	„	Secy.
Photograph	„ „	Photo	„	Photoc
Spectacles	„ „	Specs.	„	Spects.
Advertisement	„ „	Ad.	„	Advt.

1st, 2nd, 3rd and so on are not abbreviations (but forms or symbols of first, second, etc.) and so they do not need full points. The same reasoning applies to SOS, ABC, etc. Similarly, 4to, 8vo, 12mo are symbols and should have no full point.

Mr, Mrs, Dr, &c. must be printed with a full point, but not Mme, Mlle

Write PS. (not P. S ) for postscript, MM. (messieurs), S S. (steam-ship), but s.s. (screw steamer), MS (manuscript), MSS. (manuscripts), N.B., and R S.V P.

The symbolic letters I O U should be used without full points

Use lb for both singular and plural, not lbs Also omit the plural -s in the following cm, cwt, dwt, gr, gm, in, min., mm, oz., sec But insert the plural -s in tons, yds, qrs.

Write Kt for Knight, and Bt for Baronet. Bar-at-law is for barrister

## **Apostrophe**

Omit the apostrophe in the plural forms of such contractions as M A s, M.P s, K C s

Apostrophes in abbreviations similar to the following should join up close to the letters—don't, 'em, haven't, o'er, shan't, shouldn't, 'tis, won't, there'll, I'd, I'll, we'll

An apostrophe should not be used with the pronouns hers, ours, theirs, yours, its

Generally speaking—

When two dates are joined (1941—42), use a dash rather than a hyphen

Titles such as Ph D should be close up, no space

The principal words in a heading are always capitalized, but not the articles such as a, an, the; prepositions such as in, or, into, conjunctions such as either, and, as

Never begin a sentence with a figure. Always spell it out.

The ampersand (or "&") should not be used between words in reading matter.

Whenever poetry is quoted, the opening quote-marks should go out into the margin, so that the alignment of the following lines is flush with the first word, not with the quotes

If the letter writer is one of those who say, "Nobody is going to be *benefitted* by this," he needs some help in the correct spelling of a certain class of words. This class consists of words of more than one syllable, ending with one consonant preceded by one vowel, and not accented on the last syllable. I give below a few common words.

ballot	balloted	balloting
benefit	benefited	benefiting
bias	biased	biasing
bigot	bigoted	—
bracket	bracketed	bracketing
budget	budgeted	budgeting

docket	docketed	docketing
focus	focused	focusing
initial	initialed	initialing
market	marketed	marketing
profit	profited	profiting
rivet	riveted	riveting

Some people get mixed up about words like anybody and any one. For their information I give below a small but not complete list of such words

### Words without a hyphen—I

anybody	anywhere	maybe
anyhow	bedroom	meanwhile
anything	everything	meantime
downstairs	everyway	midday
evermore	goodwill	outdoor
everyday	headmaster	percentage
everywhere	( <i>adverb</i> )	postmaster
eyewitness	keynote	wellnigh
footnote	lawsuit	widespread
( <i>as adj</i> )	layout	wrongdoing
	lifelong	zigzag

### Words without a hyphen—II

any one	free will
common sense	live stock

DEAR SIR

I dare say

no one

every one

post office

fellow men

some one

for ever

The information given in this chapter is merely indicative and is in no way exhaustive. That handy little book *Rules for Compositors & Readers* issued by the Oxford University Press is bound to be of immense help to the letter writer who wishes to be exact in his compositions.

## CHAPTER XVII

# INTERVIEWING MANNERS

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PERHAPS you remember the story most of us learned in our schooldays. A "seth" had a vacancy for an intelligent lad. In order to test the applicants he purposely placed a book on the floor in the middle of his room. The applicants either kicked the book aside or ignored it – all except one. This boy not only arranged his shoes carefully in a corner outside, but as he entered the room, he lifted the book out of his way and placed it tenderly upon a table. The job went to him.

Not all employers lay traps for applicants in this way. But, believe me, many of them have shrewd ways of 'sizing up' people. With them, as with almost all of us, first impressions count most. Your intelligence or your experience will avail little if you offend your prospective employer at first sight by some thoughtless – and perhaps unconscious – action.

Here are a few suggestions

Be careful about your 'approach'. Don't dress flashily or loudly. Many employers do not like appli-



DEAR SIR

~~can't~~ wearing expensive suits, especially if the salary the post carries is small.

Do not dress too poorly to impress upon the big man how needy you are. Be simple, clean and tidy.

Don't wear creaking shoes or shoes with iron spikes. The employer will be irritated. Besides, the noise you will make will make you feel self-conscious, especially if you have to walk quite a few paces or if there are two or three persons facing you. See also that your shoes are polished and clean

Don't just grasp a chair and sit down. Sit down only when asked, and don't forget to say "Thank you" when you are offered a chair.

Be natural when seated. Neither sit on the edge nor loll back.

Refrain from wiping your glasses. This is hardly necessary if you have taken the precaution of wiping them before being called in. Besides, your hands may shake because of nervousness.

If you must use your handkerchief, see that it is clean. It is fatal to pull out a dirty handkerchief before your prospective employer.

Don't drum on the chair or on the table before you.

Don't lean on the table or rest your hand on it. Many people have the unfortunate habit of behaving

so at an interview This savours of familiarity and rare is the employer who likes his staff to be familiar with him—certainly not at the first interview

Don't fidget or play with any article upon the table.

Above all for God's sake, DON'T be inquisitive Never try to read any paper lying on the table Keep your eyes averted

If there is a book upon the table, don't turn over the pages out of curiosity or playfulness

Be observant by all means, but if the big man is busy and asks you to wait, don't turn round in your chair to see what is happening behind you If there is a woman in the room, for the love of God have the sense to keep your eyes off her

Don't speak loudly.

Don't speak with an affected accent

Be brief and to the point Remember that the employer has many things to look to and he does not like his time wasted.

Don't cut in while he is speaking You will feel small if he says, "Just listen to me, please " In any case, interrupting somebody is bad manners

Neither overstate your case, nor understate it.

Be dignified, polite and truthful in your answers

DEAR SIR

Don't brag and give fantastic promises. You should measure your abilities and shortcomings carefully. Promises have a nasty way of *coming up* when you *fall* short of expectations.

Don't boast about your family. Employers are more interested in your abilities than in your connections—generally speaking.

Don't be servile and don't flatter. Keep a dignified bearing.

Don't let your eyes rove while you are talking. It is a sign of inattention, and it is insulting.

Don't crack your knuckles or make noises with your tongue.

If you are forced to cough, hold a handkerchief before your mouth. Avoid blowing your nose and don't sniff. If you have the unfortunate habit of spraying saliva while talking, avert your face.

Never lose your temper. It might earn you a bad name.

## YOU HAD BEEN WARNED!

THE end is rather an odd place to explain the purpose of a book—even if it is only a small book like this—but it had to be the end

When you read all about a book in the beginning of it, you usually forget what you have read, and when you forget, you are worried and you interrupt your reading to look up the beginning just to see whether what it says squares with what the book contains, and that is a distraction and you do not enjoy the book at all.

Well, if you expected this book to contain elements of style like brevity and courtesy and clearness, the rules of composition, systems of filing and all that, and you didn't find them – I am sorry. You can find these things in lots of books on commercial correspondence written by clever and experienced men, some of which have become standard books on the subject

After reading some of these books I was troubled by some of the things I have put down in this book. So I had to read between the lines and figure out things left unsaid. What I thus read and figured out I have collected in this book and that's why the sub-title calls it a "between-the-lines book"

You had been warned!

## SOME OPINIONS

I have gone through the whole of Mr. K. D. Aga's book, which he appropriately calls *Dear Sir, or A Between-the-Lines Book on Business Letter-writing*. At the end of his book, Mr. Aga warns his readers against confusing it with a book on elements of style and the rest of it, but I feel certain that several of his readers would do well to give as much heed to what he has incidentally said on these matters, as to the immensely practical hints he has sown broadcast throughout. There is, as I understand it, very little *real* difference between business letter-writing and work-a-day English. Brevity, accuracy, clearness and propriety are as much a *sine-qua-non* of work-a-day English as of business correspondence. The uncertainty arises only when you come to fix the proportion between convention or tradition on one side and distinction or originality on the other. I daresay that business correspondence, on the whole, may lay a little more stress on convention than on distinction, and though it is very difficult to draw a line between what is right and what is not quite right, I do feel that the time has come when some of the *hackneyisms* of business letters must be given up. Mr. Aga's book comes up to my expectations even in this respect. I have therefore no hesitation in recommending it to all those who are keen on finding out and doing what is, or what ought to be, the correct thing in business correspondence.

K. M. Khadye, M. A. (Cantab).  
Professor of English,  
Nowrosjee Wadia College, Poona.

I must congratulate you on your effort and the great pains that you must have taken to include so many different aspects of commercial letter writing. I send my best wishes for the success of your very interesting venture.

M. J. Antia, M A , LL B., Bar-at-Law  
(Principal, Sydenham College of Commerce.)

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I am, as far as Literary English is concerned, a bit of a purist myself. But I have no special aversion for "Commercialese" any more than I have for "Journalese". At all events, I am all for Organic English, giving unmistakable evidence of vital growth and healthy experimentation in the matter of coining new words and useful phrases. As such I welcome "Commercialese", though I quite realise the danger ahead of it -- of cultivating a jargon of its own and then light-heartedly moving in a rut of redundant phrases and meaningless verbiage. Here Mr. Aga's "Dear Sir" comes in as a handy compendium, showing just where the danger lies and how it should be avoided.

A. S. Wadia, M. A.,  
Author of the Message Series  
and other books.

DEAR SIR

The varied subject matter and the lively style of "Dear Sir" make it interesting as well as informative. Especially valuable is the chapter on "Have a Heart, Boss" It is a subject too often overlooked. The suggestions about securing advertisements are based on the latest ideas in the field, and ought to be of great use here in India I would commend the book to all those, employers and employees, who wish to see better business methods adopted in India.

P. Kodanda Rao, M. A.  
of the *Hrtavada* and the Servants of India  
Society, Nagpur





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